
T R A F F I C A N D
P A R K I N G



Introduction

Growing reliance on the automobile, combined with increased growth in Cambridge, Boston and surrounding communities, has resulted in an exacerbation of traffic and parking problems in North Cambridge. Traffic can become particularly congested on the two major routes through the neighborhood: the Alewife Brook Parkway and Massachusetts Avenue. This congestion, in turn, causes greater volumes of traffic on residential streets. In addition, employees, commercial customers and residents must compete for a limited number of on-street parking spaces.

At the same time, North Cambridge is well served by the MBTA's Red Line. Porter Square, Davis Square and the Alewife MBTA stations are all within walking distance of different parts of the neighborhood. Buses and trolleys also run along Massachusetts Avenue and Rindge Avenue. The availability of public transportation and a growing awareness of the traffic and parking impacts of development provide a backdrop for necessary transportation changes. In the coming years, the ability to mitigate traffic related impacts of new developments, increase the use of mass transit and public transportation, and reduce automobile dependency will require a strong level of commitment and cooperation on behalf of state and local officials, businesses and residents.

This chapter does not present new research on traffic and parking issues. Rather, it highlights neighborhood opinions, lists the Study Committee's concerns, and presents the Community Development Department and North Cambridge Study Committee recommendations on this critical issue.

Neighborhood Survey Results

(1) When residents were asked to list the three things they liked best about their neighborhood, 18 percent of North Cambridge residents cited public transportation.

(2) While most residents are not concerned about the availability of public transportation, traffic

congestion and the lack of parking were considered to be serious problems:

- Three percent of residents considered inadequate public transportation to be a major problem, 17 percent said it was a minor problem and 79 percent said it was no problem.
- Fifty-six percent considered the lack of parking to be a major problem, 20 percent said it was a minor problem and 21 percent said it was no problem.
- Forty-five percent said traffic congestion was a major problem, 31 percent said it was a minor problem and 24 percent said it was no problem.
- Most residents travel to work by car (60%), but a substantial number use public transportation to get to work (30%). Nine percent walk, ride a bicycle or work at home.

(4) Thirty-six percent of North Cambridge residents work in Cambridge. Of these residents, 52 percent drive, 22 percent use public transportation and 25 percent walk, bicycle or work at home.

Study Committee Concerns

(1) **Traffic Congestion:** The amount of traffic in North Cambridge has increased steadily over the past few years. Increased traffic congestion has resulted in higher accident levels, greater amounts of noise, trip delays, and an overall deterioration in the quality of life. The Committee is concerned that new development will further exacerbate this situation.

(2) **Public Transportation:** Although the MBTA has three subway stations which serve North Cambridge residents, many parts of the neighborhood are in need of improved bus service.

- The Arlington buses, which run most frequently on Massachusetts Avenue, do not always make scheduled stops in North Cambridge.

- The Rindge Avenue bus runs infrequently during non-rush hours, and often misses those times for which it is scheduled to make stops.
- Better means of transit are needed to transport North Cambridge residents to their jobs in the Alewife area, to stores and other activities in Porter Square, and to the shopping centers at Fresh Pond.
- Alternative means of transportation are needed to discourage non-Cambridge residents from driving through North Cambridge on their way to other destinations.

(3) **Parking:** The decision regarding how much parking to require involves a number of trade-offs: open space versus asphalt; underground parking versus increased building bulk; parking availability versus traffic congestion. These issues need to be studied carefully to insure that the most appropriate choices are made.

In addition, specific areas within North Cambridge have parking problems which are unique to the characteristics of those areas. For example, parking is particularly difficult for residents who live on side streets between Massachusetts Avenue and the Somerville line. Due to the residential sticker program in both cities, residents may park their cars only on portions of their street. The Committee would like to see some creative solutions applied to these unique situations.

(4) **Trucks:** Large trucks using small residential streets are a problem: they create noise; obstruct traffic; and damage trees, sidewalks, and private property.

(5) **Porter Square:** Traffic congestion and parking are serious problems in the Porter Square area. The current shortage of commercial parking spaces is causing non-residents (employees and customers) to park on residential streets, creating serious problems for area residents. On the other hand, the Committee is concerned that the provision of additional large scale parking garages will simply exacerbate the problem by encouraging more people to drive to the area. Action needs to be taken to alleviate this situation in a manner which

is sensitive to the needs of those residents living in and around Porter Square.

(6) **Rindge Avenue:** Due to the presence of an elementary school, park and recreation area, teen center and library, residents are particularly concerned about the increasing level of traffic on Rindge Avenue. They would like to ensure that this traffic will not adversely affect the safety level for pedestrians using these facilities.

Traffic and Parking Recommendations

(1) Establish strict traffic mitigation measures for all new commercial developments in North Cambridge.

(2) Work with local, regional, and state officials to create an effective forum for regional transportation planning efforts.

(3) Cambridge residents and officials should form a task force to work with state representatives on an ongoing basis to accomplish the following recommendations:

- The MBTA should build satellite parking along Route 128 and in Belmont and Arlington. The number of buses travelling between the Boston and Cambridge area and these communities should then be increased.
- The MBTA should expand their marketing of T passes to encourage the use of public transportation.
- The MBTA should improve North Cambridge bus and trolley service by increasing the frequency of service along Massachusetts Avenue and Rindge Avenue, and by ensuring that its schedules are met.
- The MBTA should improve its service on the Red Line trains to encourage people to use public transportation.

(4) The Community Development Department is currently working with Cambridge businesses and CARAVAN For Commuters to establish a city-wide program in which employers would of-

fer alternative transportation services to their buildings. The Committee supports this effort, but recommends that the program include an aggressive strategy to target the Alewife area.

(5) Ensure that new commercial developments keep their parking to a minimum in the Alewife area.

(6) Ensure that new commercial parking is kept to a minimum in the Porter Square area with no construction of any public parking facilities.

(7) The Traffic and Parking Department should aggressively enforce the resident sticker, visitor pass and double parking regulations.

(8) Work with area businesses and residents to establish reasonable truck delivery hours in those commercial areas which directly affect residential properties.

(9) Ensure that area residents who will be affected by new parking regulations or changes to the one-way street system are notified when these changes are being considered, and are included in the formulation of these policies.

(10) Consider the installation of a traffic signal/walk light on Rindge Avenue across from the Fitzgerald School.